

COMMONWEAL

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September 8, 1995

People at work

IN THE MIDST OF DEATH, WE ARE IN LIFE

There at Greg's side

David Loxterkamp

CONVERSION ON THE JOB

Grace leaps the wall

Eric Bauman

MAXIMUM SPEED, MINIMUM PAY

*Hanging clothes,
serving lunch*

Sally Gunter

ROBOT WORKERS

Herbert J. Gans

JOSEPH D. POLICANO: Cuba embraces the dollar

GARY PREVOST: Investing in Cuba

DANIEL CALLAHAN: Yes, we could be Nazis

RICHARD ALLEVA reviews

'Indian in the Cupboard' & 'Smoke'



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'Hispanic Condition'**

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IA WREN on Robertson Davies

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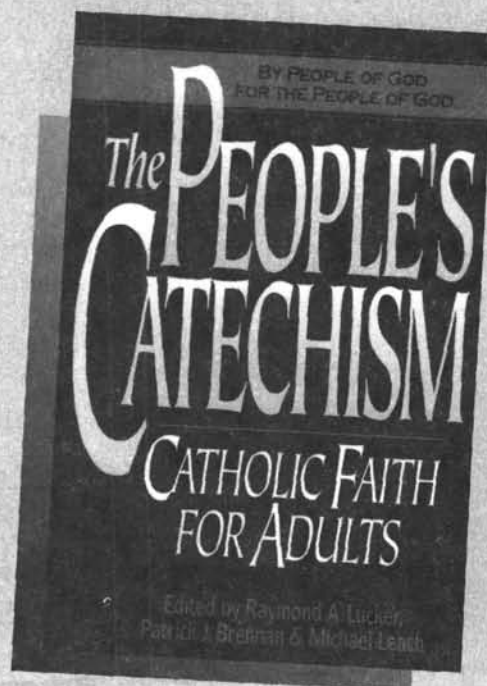
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COMMONWEAL

September 8, 1995 / Volume CXXII, Number 15

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Looks different, no? You like, yes? Send us your savage critiques, your loving commendations, your suggestions for further dynamic typographical renewal.



To the Editors

Fleet wrote a diatribe

As a surgeon who has lectured and practiced within the Soviet health-care system for over a quarter-century, I found Robert Fleet's article "Being Sick in America: Try the Polish Cure" [June 16] extremely disturbing. To contrast American medicine with Polish health care in a technical and professional sense and conclude that we fail in the comparison is not only ridiculous but borders on the bizarre. I can recall a few years ago, when we were literally begging our hospitals in this country to help us supply medicines and equipment for Polish hospitals, since medical care had deteriorated to such a degree that we were looking at that of a third-world country. It is really Poland's move toward a free-market economy and capitalism that is responsible for some improvement in medicine in that country.

Mr. Fleet should remember that even today thousands of physicians from all over the world, including Poland, travel to our academic centers for advanced training in medical and surgical specialties. What his diatribe really comes down to is not a criticism of our technical prowess but more the fact that he and his wife had a series of unfortunate adventures in dealing with the new world of managed care and health maintenance organizations in California. I am delighted that his wife is doing so well, but in all probability the surgical techniques and instrumentation used for her heart operation were learned and designed in this country. ROBERT J. WHITE, M.D.

Cleveland, Ohio

The writer is professor of surgery in the school of medicine at the Case Western Reserve University.

The real medical issue

Robert Fleet's article points out the

practical dilemmas of obtaining professional medical treatment within our Western democracies. Too often, discussion of this most vital subject is bogged down in ideological dogmatism. The disputants are hesitant to concede any point to the opposing side or sides for fear of stepping on to a slippery slope leading to Armageddon.

To be viable, any conversation about health care must confront a cold reality: Only the very wealthiest of individuals—probably less than 1 percent of the population of the civilized world—will be able to escape dealing with the bureaucracy of a managed health-care system. Families earning \$250,000 a year could easily find themselves in financial crisis if hit with a costly type of medical emergency. Those who carry premium health insurance are naive to believe that they will be able to choose any course of treatment they desire; in fact, officials of even the most deluxe insurance programs impose financial constraints on treatment.

For most of us, then, the only real question is whether the bureaucrat we will argue and plead with will belong to the private or the public sector. Managed health care is here to stay; it is intellectually dishonest to argue otherwise.

DAVID THOMSON
Houston, Tex.

Flawed by hyperbole

Robert Fleet's article highlights some of the greatest shortcomings of the American health-care system. Indeed, it is the medically indigent—those with jobs but without health insurance—who are among its greatest victims. But the hyperbole used in the article does little to advance the argument for needed reforms.

Mr. Fleet says that, during his wife's hospitalization in California: "Few [physicians] bothered to look at her medical records. One wrote up a 'detailed' examination that had lasted less than a minute and involved no physical contact at all. Still another

put down a room visit for a day when he was very specifically absent."

Such venality exists both within and outside medicine in this country, but is hardly the standard of care anywhere. Not a single health-care professional would condone this behavior, and hospitals and medical staffs do a very credible job of policing such activity.

In contrast, my impression of the Polish health-care system, from talking with colleagues who recently attempted to establish an American-style clinic there, is that it may be long on compassion, but that's all. The reason for their clinic's failure was the existence of widespread corruption among officials and health-care professionals—those with the "vocation" of which Mr. Fleet spoke. Furthermore, the level of training for physicians in Poland is about the same as that for nurse practitioners here. They may be fine for treating your sore throat, but not for replacing your heart valve.

A cogent argument can be made that national health-care systems, such as are found in much of the industrialized world, necessarily require trade-offs: In exchange for fewer choices, everyone can be covered by insurance. Many of us would find that a very reasonable bargain. But indicting American health-care professionals while extolling the virtues of a health-care system stuck in the Middle Ages is hardly a productive argument for the cause. FRANK MAGLIERY

Carmel, Ind.

The author replies:

Before commenting on these letters, let me acknowledge two errors in the article pointed out by another correspondent: "filibration" should be "fibrillation" and "epiglottal ulcer" should be "epiglottal problems and a stomach ulcer." Blame it on a heavy mouse-button finger.

On substance: Dr. White uses "Soviet Union" and "Poland" inter-

(Continued on page 26)

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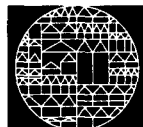
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C O M M O N W E A L



Labor's new day?

There is nothing like an old cliché to convey a timeless moral. So here goes: The union movement, like a slumbering giant, awoke this summer. Not twitched, not rolled over, not raised an eyelid, but woke up. And perhaps for the first time in many decades, the union movement will stop being a shopworn topic for Labor Day editorials.

Three signs of new energy: (1) Lane Kirkland, president of the AFL-CIO for sixteen years, resigned under pressure—however deferentially expressed. (2) This has led to a contested election (unprecedented) for a new president in November, thus encouraging open acknowledgment (long overdue) of the declining fortunes of unionism, and a serious debate over how to win back members and organize millions of new workers. (3) The steel workers, automobile workers, and machinists, three of the nation's largest unions, with a total of 2 million members, agreed to merge over the next five years. What does this all add up to? In a world economy where corporate interests dominate and in the lean, mean corporate atmosphere within which unions must organize, unions need more vital leadership, the consolidation of resources, the end of competition to organize the same workers, and the commitment of money and personnel to organize.

This would all be to the good. But is it good enough? And in time enough?

The diminishment of the union movement's power and influence over the last quarter century can be measured in the steady decline of real wages, health and pension benefits, and job security. This is true for members and nonmembers of labor unions. The true advocate for working people are not government regulators, the Department of Labor, or the Democratic party, but rather labor unions. Their loss of power, and more critically of moral and political suasion, has had repercussions far beyond its own membership, which itself has declined over the last twenty years from about one-third of the nation's nonagricultural workers to less than 15 percent, some 13 million workers.

Labor's decline has been attributed to many outside forces: globalization of the economy; the flight of U.S. manufacturers to cheaper labor markets, first in the South of the United States and then abroad; a steady supply of immigrants willing to work for nonunion wages; and a shift from manufacturing to service jobs. But an economy that continues to produce millions of new jobs every year is an economy that has work for unions: organize workers.

In a classic essay on unions, Wilfrid Sheed quotes George Meany, Kirkland's equally long-serving predecessor, "Why should we worry about organizing groups of people who do not appear to want to be organized? If they prefer to have others speak for them and make the decisions which affect their lives without effective participation of their part, that is their right" (*Three Mobs: Labor, Church and Mafia*, Sheed & Ward).

When Meany spoke in 1974, 25 percent of U.S. workers were organized; time has shown how shortsighted his oddly complacent views were. Kirkland was no improvement. On top of that, many ensconced union leaders and well-paid workers were themselves complacent in the face of the enormous economic shifts of the '70s and '80s. Writes Sheed, they made the "Roman

Catholic Curia look downright flighty."

An aggressive organizing campaign—including commitments of money and new personnel—is promised by both Thomas Donahue and John Sweeney, who are competing to head the AFL-CIO. That will not resolve all of labor's woes, but if successful, it will go some way in giving working men and women a forum and a focus in an economy and a political system increasingly unwilling to acknowledge that their own health and productivity rests on justly compensated workers.

Yet unions themselves often seem equally remote from their members. It is curious that when a genuine American populism is pressing for greater responsiveness from the government and both political parties, that a greater measure of representation, if not democracy, is not being demanded in the workplace and the union hall. Perhaps the AFL-CIO should consider term limits for its officers and bring the wage scale of its leadership into closer parity with the rank and file. That might go some way toward convincing workers that labor unions are part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Joseph D. Policano

CUBA EMBRACES THE DOLLAR **But Castro isn't convertible**

Nothing I had read prepared me for my recent three-week stay in Castro's Cuba. I had visited Havana forty years ago, as a weekend tourist, a trip I remember only for seeing one of Carmen Miranda's last performances. So I had to read up on the "new" Cuba. I found that phrases like "economic hardships," "special period," and "shortages" are antiseptic until one sees how they translate into actual living conditions.

People were jammed shoulder-to-shoulder in open trucks under a 90-degree sun—teachers, students, nurses, the elderly, bureaucrats, laborers—being transported like animals to and from work as one "temporary" solution to Cuba's mass transportation problem. A working mother with two young boys was living in what was once a small store. Thin partitions separated the windowless rooms. There was a toilet, but no bath. This was, she said, an improvement over her previous home. A crowd of sixty people pressed against an outdoor stand in a middle-class section of Havana, shouting, screaming—some good naturedly, most not—at two frazzled bakery clerks who had just received the weekly shipment of ordinary dinner rolls. A few hundred people lined up at 8:30 on a Sunday morning to await the 10:30 opening of Coppelía, the only popular ice cream parlor the regime has been able to open for Havana's million-plus citizens in nearly forty years. These are just some of the scenes I witnessed every day in Havana or Santiago de Cuba, the coun-

try's second-largest city, of a people for whom the simplest acts of ordinary life have become tedious or painful chores.

Much of Havana, which was once among the world's loveliest cities, is in such a state of decay that even setting up a budget for restoration seems an impossible task. I walked through mile after mile of central old Havana and saw not more than half-a-dozen well-maintained residential buildings. In many of the buildings I visited, running water was erratic. Tenants filled large buckets and garbage pails during the time the water was on, or got their water from trucks. In the once-fashionable Vedado section of Havana, a sewage line had broken and was spilling onto the sidewalk. Forty-eight hours later, it was still not repaired.

Castro and nearly forty years of communism have given most Cubans a standard of living comparable to West Germany's in 1949. No one starves and literacy is high. While Cuba is not the color-blind society its supporters claim, it has abolished institutional racism. There are many more black Cubans visible in high government positions than there are black Puerto Ricans in San Juan. Serious crime is rare. Drug use rarer still. Medical care is readily available, though medicine for a nonlife-threatening illness is not. As cramped and as crowded and as uncomfortable as it may be, everyone has some sort of a roof over his or her head.

But for most Cubans, life is the pits, especially if you don't have U.S. dollars. Castro, the last rigid Communist leader outside of North Korea, has made the despised dollar Cuba's currency. Scarce vitamins, aspirin, meat, milk are all available for dollars; state-owned shops sell quality merchandise, but only for dollars. Hotels, restaurants, taxis are all priced in dollars. Cuban *pesos* are virtually worthless and were returned to me in disgust when I offered them as tips.

So in officially classless Cuba there are in fact two classes: Cubans who have access to dollars and those who don't. The have-nots suffer a hard life indeed. They live by their ration book. If both a husband and wife are lucky enough to be employed (and unemployment is becoming a major problem), their combined salaries are hardly enough. They have to find other sources of income to get a little more meat, simple over-the-counter medications like aspirin, or to bring an occasional splash of color to their lives. In a word that has become part of the language, Cubans *invent*. That invention may include buying and selling goods from abroad on the black market, getting dollars from relatives in the United States, driving gypsy cabs at night, doing odd jobs, or, less common though hardly rare, prostitution. A single foreign male in Havana may be forgiven if he thinks that prostitution is the city's number-one industry. In one twelve-hour period I was approached twenty-six times. These were not the hot-pants hustlers or pathetic crack addicts found in American cities. Most were workers or students, a surprising number of them teen-agers, who were using their bodies as the last resort for securing necessities for their children or luxuries like fashionable clothes for themselves.

Amid all of this poverty, what did I learn about the two issues we read most about in the States, democracy and the

American blockade? Neither one seemed uppermost in the minds of the Cubans with whom I spoke. Democracy: Cubans want an end to rationing; an end to the interminable lines for everything; they want cars and gas; they want an apartment that isn't rundown or shared with their mother, father, grandparents, and, probably, married brothers and sisters. They want a job that pays money, not the \$4 a month that the average Cuban earns. *Then*, democracy. But, they were quick to tell me, they don't want those *gusanos* (worms) from Miami back.

The American blockade? Castro rails against but uses it to hide the inefficiency and corruption of the regime. I was

told by a number of students at the University of Havana that "the products the Americans are keeping from us are available from other sources. We don't have the money to buy them. We wasted our money when the Russians were buying our sugar and now we are broke. What Fidel really wants is American dollars. If the blockade ended tomorrow nothing would change unless we get dollars."

The blockade certainly keeps American tourists from going to Havana, but I wonder about its effectiveness in isolating Cuba. American products, or their European or Asian counterparts, are readily available (for dollars). Asian, European, Canadian, and Mexican businesspeople seem to

Investing in Cuba: A Big Trickle

Five years into what Fidel has called "the special period," the standard of living of the ordinary Cuban has declined markedly. In the last four years, Cuba lost more than 75 percent of its export-import market. Tens of thousands of workers have been laid off and virtually all areas of the economy have been opened to foreign investment. These measures have been taken out of economic necessity in the hope that the overall social gains of the revolution might be protected. It is too early to gauge the long-term impact of these changes, but it seems that in the last year Cuba's prospects for economic recovery have improved.

Tourism has continued to grow, with most visitors still coming from Canada (120,000). But Cuba's tourist link has been solidified with the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America, and that region now provides one-quarter of the island's foreign visitors.

In the last year, small but potentially important steps also occurred in the area of direct foreign investment. Canadian Sherritt, Inc. announced that its offshore prospecting had tapped the best grade of oil yet found in Cuba, and that it would invest \$24 million. The company projects greater investment in the future, including prospecting in central Cuba, and signed a fifteen-year contract to refine cobalt and nickel. Cuba has become Canada's second most important Caribbean trading partner—following Puerto Rico—with 1993 trade at U.S. \$220 million. In 1994 the Canadian government ended its sixteen-year ban on official aid to the island with a \$1-million package of development and humanitarian aid.

A 1994 visit by Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari underscored renewed Mexican involvement in Cuba. Domos International of Monterrey signed a \$1.5 billion deal (the biggest private in-

vestment in Cuba since 1959) that gives it a 49-percent interest in the Cuban telephone company. Over the next seven years, Domos will overhaul the decaying Cuban phone system, increasing the number of phone lines from the current 450,000 to 1 million. Last year, Mex-Petrol signed a \$200-million joint venture to reopen an idle oil refinery in Cienfuegos. The new company will refine Mexican oil and sell it wherever it wishes. This project, together with the completion of the Cienfuegos nuclear plant, is very important to Cuba's energy future. Mexico leads all Latin American countries with \$2 billion in investments in Cuba; Brazil ranks second with \$150 million, and Chile third with \$100 million.

British companies are also apparently interested in Cuba's oil potential. Two British firms are currently working in the Ciego de Avila oil fields. To revive Cuba's flagging cigarette industry, a Brazilian subsidiary of British American Tobacco, Souza Cruz, has signed a deal that includes planting 1,730 acres of tobacco in Cuba and machinery for a factory capable of producing 6 billion cigarettes, half of Cuba's annual consumption.

These small-scale successes with foreign investment, combined with the reopening of private peasant markets, have given the Cuban government some breathing space. But they are also risky. The increase in tourism and the legalization of the dollar are exacerbating social inequities in a society that was one of the most egalitarian in the world. The revolutionary government still retains respect from a great number of Cubans but they will be watching closely as Castro leads the country on a tightrope between capitalism and socialism.

GARY PREVOST

Gary Prevost is chair of the department of government at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota.

be everywhere. Even Israel, the only country to vote with the United States in the United Nations to keep the blockade in force, has an active trade program with Havana. Though the blockade has been in force for more than thirty years, the deprivations of the last five years are new. The demise of the Soviet Union spelled the collapse of Cuba's economy. The billions of dollars the USSR poured into the country kept a badly managed and foolishly adventurist economy functioning. Without Soviet money, Castro's economy is as skewed (and becoming as corrupt) as Batista's. A waiter at a restaurant for foreigners will earn more, perhaps twenty to thirty times more, than a physician or professor.

What are we to make of Cuba? Should the United States lift the blockade and reward Fidel for mismanaging the economy and punishing his people? Not unless we have guarantees that the benefits will flow to Cuba's workers, giving them more buying power, and not into the pockets of the new Cuban elite already forming in Havana; and not unless Cuba's monolithic electoral process, modeled after the Soviet system, is replaced.

Excluding Václav Havel and Nelson Mandela, Fidel is probably the most charismatic leader in the world today, surely the most romantic. Aged liberals like myself remember the young man who overthrew a dictator, radicalized a reactionary country, brought ideals and idealism to the Caribbean, and thumbed his nose at the United States as he tried to bring social justice and economic well-being to his people.

That was then, this is now. Cuba's people are suffering; corruption has become a way of life; wealthy individuals have emerged in this Communist society and dominate many av-

enues of commerce. There is as little freedom with Castro as there was under Batista. The former European Communist countries changed their leadership along with their system. Asian countries like China and Vietnam kept the same leaders but did a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn in economic philosophy. Is Castro capable of such change? He has been quoted at great length about his willingness to "improve" socialism but says he refuses to alter his Communist principles. In a little-noted remark in a *Time* interview, he said the means of production for domestic consumption will always stay under state ownership—hardly the way to have American venture capitalists storming the beaches.

How much time does Castro have left? Since he still controls all the guns, as much time as he wants. But perhaps change is afoot. Heroic photos of Fidel no longer dominate the streets or buildings in Havana or Santiago de Cuba. Public photos of Che Guevara are more common, and representations of José Martí (1853–95), the poet and revolutionary leader, far outnumber Castro and Che combined. Yet nearly forty years of pro-Castro and Communist propaganda cannot be ignored. Fidel is still thought of as, well, Fidel. A historic figure who changed the life of the average Cuban in important ways, originally for the better, now for the worse.

I remember speaking in Amman a few years ago with a Jordanian college student, a Christian, who told me he would give his life for King Hussein. Why? "Because he has never done anything to hurt his people." I can't imagine a Cuban saying that about Castro. □

Joseph D. Policano has served with the Peace Corps in West Africa and has traveled extensively in developing nations.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

EDWARD McGLYNN GAFFNEY, JR.

THE NEUTERING OF RELIGION

Secularism as orthodoxy

Two years ago, the 103rd Congress enacted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, responding to a decision of the Supreme Court in 1990 that had diminished the protection afforded by the First Amendment to free exercise of religion. Now Congress appears agitated about the other provision in the Religion Clause, which prohibits an establishment of religion. Earlier this year Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kans.) and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) made supportive nois-

es about a school prayer amendment, but then left the contentious issue to languish in the hands of a very junior member, Congressman Ernest Istook (R-Okla.).

In 1962 the Supreme Court ruled in the *Engel* case that the no-establishment provision prohibited the recitation of pabulum-like "inoffensive" prayer such as that composed by the New York Board of Regents. A year later in the *Schempp* case, the Court forbade the devotional reading of the Bible or the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Congress responded promptly with a flurry of activity to

overturn these decisions by constitutional amendment, but these efforts died a deserved death, because they would have permitted government officials to compose prayers and to require children to say them. As one wag has put it, there will be prayer in schools as long as there are math exams. But it is a recipe for disaster to have the state determining what we should pray for and how to pray for it. No biblical believer should be content with the reduction of our prayer life to some meaningless formula such as, "O God, if you are, help me, if you can."

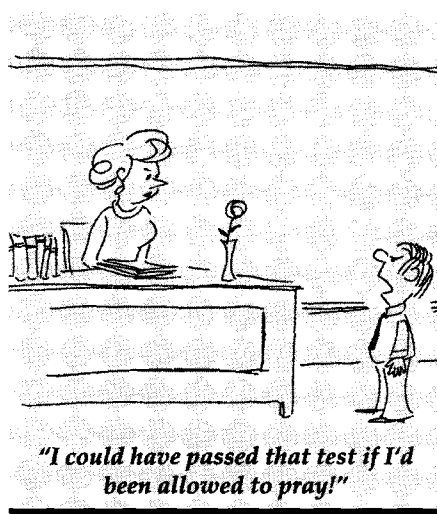
So far this year there has been only one brief hearing in a House subcommittee on this issue, drawing comment from leading constitutional scholars like Professors Michael McConnell of the University of Chicago and Douglas Laycock of the University of Texas. Both professors oppose amending the Con-

stitution to permit "voluntary" prayer in public schools. But they have enlarged the terms of the debate considerably beyond the narrow focus of earlier efforts to reverse the Supreme Court's decisions in *Engel* and *Schempp*. The current focus of the debate is on whether a constitutional amendment is necessary to secure an equal footing for religious adherents in the public forum.

Why the fuss? Is not America recognized the world over as a haven for those of all faiths and of none? Although it is true that nowhere else in the world does religion thrive with as much diversity and freedom as in this country, balanced commentators agree that we should not be content with the *status quo* on religious freedom in America. According to Laycock, what we need is not a constitutional amendment but a broader consensus that "government should neither encourage nor discourage religion, but rather government should be neutral toward religion." The problem, Laycock suggests, is that too many governmental officials are anything but neutral toward religion: "in their zeal to avoid any encouragement of religion, many school boards, governmental agencies, and lower courts have actually discriminated against religious speech and religious practice."

I noted in an earlier column ("At Jefferson's University," April 21) that this sort of discrimination was at the center of the dispute between Christian students at the University of Virginia and the university administration, which was willing to use student fee activity funds to support Muslims and Jews, but not Christians. Professor McConnell, who argued the case for the students, and Professor Laycock, who filed a brief in support of the students, can rejoice that the Court accepted their views when it ruled 5-4 on June 29 that a state university cannot grant student fee money to some students while withholding it from others on a religious ground. The Court held that this sort of practice is not neutrality, but is bias pure and simple.

The genius of the American attitude on religious freedom is that we think that religious freedom is promoted by avoiding any establishment of religion. In



other words, nonestablishment of religion is for the sake of free exercise of religion. Unlike England and Sweden, we have here no official state religion. We note with pride that that sort of arrangement is bad for nonmembers of the established church who are typically treated as second-class citizens deprived of important civil liberties. We add that establishing a religion is bad for the "preferred" religious community, which is typically sapped of its ongoing vitality precisely because of its character as an established church. In short, we have managed to overcome the dangers of state-imposed dogma, and we have come very far down the road from the dangers of governmentally coerced faith that plagued our founders. So far down that road, in fact, that we now run the risk of official governmental hostility against all religious expression in the public square, relegating religion to the realm of private opinion and practice.

This tendency is the result of several decades of court opinions that have taken us not in the direction of governmental neutrality in religious matters, but relentlessly toward increased secularization. For example, one of the standards that currently governs the interpretation of the no-establishment provision expressly requires a "secular purpose" for all law or governmental practices. Fair enough, if what is meant is that the law should genuinely serve the public order, the good of the common weal. But this standard is regrettably held by some to mean that the political process should be

completely immune from the influence of any member of society who believes in God and who thinks that his or her belief has relevance to the burning social issues of our day.

On its face this attitude of hostility to religion is antidemocratic, for the vast majority of Americans (nearly 90 percent) profess a belief in God. And a secularist hegemony that demands toleration of its own ideology but is scornful of all other views is profoundly antipluralistic. Yet a secularist bias persists among the shapers of our culture. It is found not only in editorials of leading newspapers, but even in opinions of the Supreme Court, which has never formally repudiated its shocking standard in the *Lemon* case (1971) that a law may be invalidated as a violation of the no-establishment provision if it "tends to divide us politically along religious lines." The Supreme Court itself has never relied on this standard to invalidate an act of Congress or a state law, but lower courts have invoked the standard frequently to do a lot of mischief.

As America drifts from a quasi-establishment of WASP hegemony toward a thoroughgoing secularism, we should be wary of trading one establishment for another. What goes around comes around. The established in one era can become the persecuted in another, at severe cost. Historically, that cost has included fines, imprisonment, exile, and death. It took Catholics a long time—until Vatican II's *Decree on Religious Liberty* in 1965—to acknowledge officially the evils of governmental coercion in matters of religious faith. Now that our church has clarified this issue for Catholics, we have a duty both to avoid any seeking of governmental power to advance our own religious convictions and to resist the powerful trend in our society to limit free speech to nonbelievers. Both of these tendencies are un-American. It is time for all Americans to reclaim our heritage of freedom from governmental control of religion, while affording to all—religious believers and nonbelievers alike—equal access to the public forum for the shaping of the policies that affect our common destiny. □

JOHN GARVEY

WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK

Mickey & the bottom line

It does seem fitting that Ted Koppel should work for Mickey Mouse. Still, the fact that ABC News is now in the hands of the Disney corporation has led to a lot of talk about this concentration of power over news and entertainment in a comparatively few number of hands. What will it mean for the objectivity and independence of news organizations? In fact, ABC has done serious and critical reporting of the Disney company; this obviously won't happen any more, and if, as it might be, CBS is bought by Westinghouse, you will not see CBS critics bemoaning the vapidness of the fare offered on Westinghouse radio stations, or criticizing its appliances.

This worry is well-placed: the country is becoming more and more like a middle-sized city with one or two newspapers, which depend on advertising revenues from one or two department stores. No matter what the bosses of the department stores do to their wives, no matter what odd, destructive habits their children have, no matter how vicious they are to their employees, no matter whether they engage in human sacrifice in the hills outside of town, it is a good bet little of it is likely to make the papers. Combined with the one-party state our poll-chasing politicians have given us, this is a depressing prospect.

There is another and, I think, more important aspect of this glob-like accumulation of power that also ought to concern us, and it has to do with the way in which capitalism can corrupt the nature of work itself. It is what these acquisitions say about the way every entrepreneurial endeavor seems to be tending these days that depresses me. I know that it is now unfashionable to be critical of capitalism, given its obvious

and deserved victory over communism. Attaching the possibility of profit to work makes more sense than most alternatives (which is why you will seldom see me writing letters to the editor—they don't pay you for them). I think the Left has been particularly bad at appreciating the creativity of the person who wants to sell a good idea or a better product.

At the same time, laws against monopoly or even the tendency toward monopoly, the concentration of too much power in too few hands, make good moral sense. The argument against them isn't merely pragmatic (we won't have enough product competition) or political (the news won't be reported honestly or objectively). It goes to the heart of what culture and work are about.

I remember, decades ago, wondering why Bennett Cerf sold Random House to RCA. At one level, the answer was obvious: money. But my wonder was this: Cerf had all the money he needed. He loved books—he was the man who had bought the Modern Library from Horace Liveright and kept a wonderful series alive, expanding it; he brought Joyce's *Ulysses* to America and defended it against obscenity charges in court. He knew and loved books and publishing, and he sold a major publishing company to people whose only concern with it was how much money it could make for them.



I am sure he was not the first person to do this, but he was the first I noticed and wondered about. What bothered me then and bothers me still is the way in which work is corrupted when it is moved away from the love of work, which is always something very specific, like the smell of good bread, toward the more abstract notion of profit. I don't mean to romanticize work. I am as lazy by nature as the next person, and I know that some parts of even the most interesting work involve drudgery. I have worked as a writer and editor, and enjoy some parts of the process and loathe others. But at the end there is a product that (if you love or at least like what you are doing) makes sense to you, beyond the question of whether you can make money with it or not. This is why so many of the greatest publishers were willing to publish mediocre books to subsidize books that *should* have been published, even if they lost money. That sense of "should" is there only when you love the work itself more than the profit you might make from it. There is a kind of law here: the farther you move away from love of the work, the worse will the work be. And when profit becomes everything, good work becomes nothing.

When you have publishers who care only about the bottom line (because they are owned by larger companies which aren't at all concerned with books), and they sell to "superstores" which care only about the bottom line, you are less and less likely to find a book that was made by someone who loves books for the magic that might be there. And that magic is all that ever brought any of us who really love them to books in the first place.

The freedom that capitalism represents shouldn't obscure for us the fact that it is often terribly destructive at the cultural level. There is no greater change-agent than the instant creation and satisfaction of appetites, something unnoticed by those free-marketeers who bemoan that decline of traditional values. Where there is no attachment or love greater than the love of profit, when this is finally all that drives our economic life, the soul goes out of a society. □

IN THE MIDST OF DEATH, WE ARE IN LIFE

There at Greg's side

David Loxterkamp

It was toward the close of Mass on the Second Sunday of Lent. Twenty screeching voices and three clanging guitars were barreling down the home stretch of the finale, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." From the rise of the altar where I directed the Saint Francis Youth Choir, I could scan the whole congregation: below me, the smiling faces of the first-row regulars; high in back, balcony-dwellers fidgeting through the final refrain; and to my far right, stragglers and families of unruly youngsters who took refuge behind the open doors of the adjoining parish hall.

Already parishioners were rising to leave by way of the south side aisle. Today they seemed unusually raucous, with bodies scurrying and arms waving and a crowd converging to a point several pews back. Suddenly I heard my name, "Doctor Loxterkamp, come quickly," as a young woman grabbed my guitar and another rushed me to a body sprawled on the carpet and wedged into a narrow passage. He made no motion or sound while all around me the crowd shouted, "He's a diabetic. Get him some sugar," and packets simultaneously appeared from a dozen different handbags. Others ushered the children toward their religion classes and urged lingering parishioners out the rear of the church.

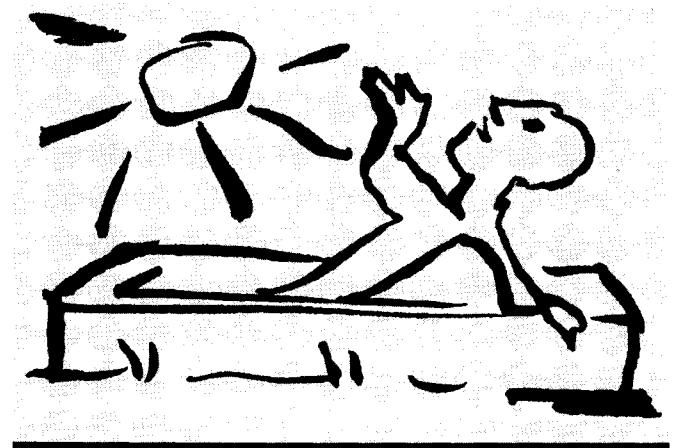
On further inspection I could see that the ashen man was our parish council president, only a few years my senior and in apparent good health. He was unconscious and could not be aroused. His skin was cool and mottled even though only a minute had passed since his collapse. Since he was not breathing, I propped his head, pinched his nose, and forced a full breath of air into his lungs. He gasped spontaneously, then again, now several times in obvious response to our urgent cries to "Breathe, Greg, breathe."

But there was no pulse. I groped for the carotid and femoral arteries and pressed my ear to his chest. Where was it? Surely it was there, for hadn't he just sighed and turned his head; wasn't he merely suffering from a drop in blood sugar? Reluctantly, disbelievingly, we began CPR, the three nurses and I who now huddled around him. With glacial speed I pondered the conflicting evidence: A youngish man

was having an insulin reaction. How could he be unresponsive and pulseless! I heard Father Ray softly intoning what sounded like the prayers of the sacrament of the sick. Someone assured me that an ambulance had been called; another instructed the onlookers to "give them air," followed soon by the clunk of double doors swinging ajar and a blast of cold air reaching us from the rear of church.

Without any tools—a stethoscope or blood pressure cuff, a bag-and-mask or I.V. line—I felt astonishingly naked and helpless. Yet we labored on, doctor and nurses, priest and parishioners, through the unpardonable delays of the ambulance crew. When it finally arrived, the wall clock recorded—to my astonishment—a lapse of only eight minutes. The crew and I hoisted Greg to the back of the church where we attached the defibrillator leads. It confirmed the presence of ventricular fibrillation, and with two jolts from the paddles we converted our patient to a normal sinus rhythm. But still no pulse, still a stillness in that bared chest and those heavy mottled limbs.

The hospital was only a half-mile away, and we continued the rescue efforts there for well over an hour. Thankfully, a colleague of mine took charge, though he allowed little hope for a reversible outcome. Despite the march of regular beats across the monitor screen, our patient and friend and fellow parishioner lay moribund on the cot, having died instantly in the side aisle of the church, during his unbroken fall to the floor.



DAVID LOXTERKAMP, M.D., is the director of the Saint Francis Youth Choir and practices family medicine in Belfast, Maine.

I accompanied the attending physician to the small office where Greg's wife Bonnie was waiting. As we entered, the younger daughter Betsy arrived and embraced her mother, weeping, "I knew something was wrong, something had to be wrong." My throat tightened as a wound reopened inside me: memories of a Memorial Day weekend in 1966 when I returned from a canoe trip to learn of my father's fatal heart attack. He was a year older than Greg; I was the same age as Betsy when we heard the dreaded news.

I reviewed the morning's details with Bonnie and Betsy, who had been absent from the 8:30 Mass. I assured them that we had done everything possible, and felt terrible that we hadn't done enough. And I found myself repeating these words over and over during the ensuing days, to acquaintances of the deceased and the nurses who assisted me and the office staff who comforted me in a genuine show of concern. I confessed to one of the nurses that this was my first resuscitation outside of the hospital. "Mine, too," she replied sheepishly. "Do you think we did all right?"

"The best we could," was all that I could muster.

It was a week of strange conjunctions. I would turn forty-two in a few days, and birthdays are a treacherous time for me to plumb the mysteries of mortality. Even though I am in good health and free of the niggling ills that, after a certain age, badger us into believing we have hit the downward slide, I am also adopted and—therefore, in my wife's opinion—a walking genetic time bomb.

I recently heard from a social worker friend that April is the peak month for suicide. In the season so redolent with rebirth and awakening, hope and renewal, perhaps the contrast with one's own despair can be utterly overwhelming. So the words hit me hard, those of John Rutter's *Requiem* that we had been rehearsing in our community chorus. During the *Agnus Dei*, Rutter writes a sobering chant in the bass clef

where the men maintain a monotone, "In the midst of life, we are in death." This notion is what makes the "Lamb of God" the Good Friday of the Catholic Mass: Incredulously, we beseech the very Lamb whom the Father had forsaken to grant mercy on our mortal souls. So saturated were these words with the memory of Greg and my father and my own tenuous circumstance that tears flooded my eyes as I sang.

A doctor's life is a continuous *memento mori*, a reminder of death and life's unfairness, fragility, and the speed with which all good things pass. Every day we console families in their struggles with disabled children, untimely deaths, or the decline of aging parents. Why are we spared? When will our trials begin?

On Monday evening I attended the wake with my fellow parishioners, patients, acquaintances—all of us connected to Greg MaGuire by the Appleton School or the Catholic church, Democratic politics, or Greg's video business. As we passed through the receiving line, I suddenly came upon Greg's daughters, and squatted low to grip their hands and whisper, "I was at your father's side when he died. I just wanted you to know how much I liked and respected him. Even though my father died, too, when I was your age, I have felt him beside me my whole life."

Indeed, I thought, my father's death had changed me forever, kindling an interest in hospice care, attracting me to my wife who had also lost her mother in adolescence, driving me to seek out the Spirit abiding in every death. For it has been the Spirit I have sought ever since. In the midst of death, *we are in life*....I recall now how the *Requiem* tide turns, and our voices swell with the Easter refrain, "whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Easter, the time when catechumens traditionally enter the Catholic church, is more than a witness to faith. It is about a community of the faithful. It is about how communities respond in good times and in bad. I could now view our rescue efforts in something other than a medical light. It was not just a failed attempt. It was not just an exercise in moral or professional obligation. What mattered was the privilege we all felt as we rushed to Greg's side on that Sunday morning, trusting that he would have been there for us, knowing we may be called upon again.

After a time, this small community has brought me to an understanding that pilgrims often grasp on the road to a religious shrine, or anthropologists absorb in their studies of exotic tribes: that I am like my neighbor, and part of my neighbor is in me. I am the lucky one. I had the necessary training, a role to play, the means to express my love for my neighbor, and a way to exercise my belonging in the community.

I have learned by living here that we are all part of the same family. The baby I delivered to the mother who sings with me at church is married to my auto mechanic whose father brokered the purchase of my home. Anger and frustration in my practice often stems from an injured or empty

Cornelia Veenendaal The Good Samaritan

All life is clinging like fire
in Van Gogh's *Good Samaritan*:
hands of the man left for dead
cling to his rescuer's shoulders,
the horse balances on the bank of a stream,
scrub pines clutch the precipice.
The Samaritan holds the center in midday sun—
red turban, yellow caftan tucked up—
he twists back, struggling to raise
the blue-lipped, strengthless man
onto his horse. All legs and arms,
all awkwardness, his compassion.

place in my own heart, that my patients help me to see, which because of its exposure can now begin to heal.

Without a sense of community, Greg's tragedy might seem an imposition or intrusion on the privacy of my prayers. Without community, I would forfeit the support of my fellow parishioners. Without community, I might have choked in my grief instead of dispersing it through words of sorrow and sympathy and thanksgiving. Without community, I could not rebuke the claim made against all of God's creation, at every moment and with every turn: that in the midst of life, we are in death.

Tuesday brought the Funeral Mass and the return of the Saint Francis Youth Choir. We gathered in the chapel to rehearse our songs before Mass. I was surprised to see all twenty members in attendance, plus four more who had asked to come along, maybe out of a need to say good-bye or bring closure to the terror and confusion of Sunday's ordeal. The family had chosen "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," the last words Greg had heard before he died. But I was having doubts about singing it now, and meant to assuage them, or at least acknowledge them, in front of the children. Twenty-four intent, frightened, innocent pairs of eyes fixed upon me as I rose to speak.

I told them, in words as straight as possible, what I had

lately come to know. That Greg had been sick for a long time, and knew—better than the rest of us—that his end was near. His wife had asked us to sing, but that was only part of the reason we were here today. Singing is also a way to say "thank you" for all that Greg did for the children of the parish. For the religion classes he taught, the parish outings he organized, the interests of kids he defended as council president. We were here, too, to finish what had been left unfinished: the song we were singing on Sunday; our lives, which God had chosen for us to continue.

A tiny hand shot up and wiggled from the second row, "But why do we have to sing the same song? It feels a little creepy."

"To me, too," I agreed. "But when we sing the words, remember not only Greg, but all your relatives who have gone before us, and 'you and me, brother,' believers of every stripe."

A wide swath of community had assembled that morning for the Rite of Christian Burial. We were Catholics and Protestants, the young and the old, saints and sinners, the living among the dead, all lining the wooden pews like the fingers of a folded hand. We had come to honor a soft-spoken man who labored a lifetime for his community, and for our greater awareness of an unseen hand.

By the sheer strength of our numbers, we can believe that, in the midst of death, we are in life. Living among friends, and in my line of work, that is the only faith you need. □

DISCIPLES AND DEMOCRACY

Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics

Edited by MICHAEL CROMARTIE

The religious right, currently the subject of intense press attention, is here scrutinized by both insiders and outside observers. Journalists **Fred Barnes** (*The New Republic*), **Michael Barone** (*U.S. News & World Report*), and **E. J. Dionne** (*Washington Post*), activists **Ralph Reed** (Christian Coalition) and **Michael Farris**, and scholarly analysts **John Green**, **Allen Hertzke**, **Michael Horowitz**, **Richard Land**, and **George Weigel** examine the agenda of religious conservatives, their influence upon the 1992 election, and whether and how they can increase their political influence in the next four years. In a foreword, **Irving Kristol** calls religious conservatives "the very core of an emerging American conservatism." The volume, published jointly by the Ethics and Public Policy Center and Eerdmans, includes brief comments by eighteen other informed observers as well. 147 pages, paper, \$12.99 ■ ISBN 0-8028-0847-6

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CONVERSION ON THE JOB

Grace leaps the wall

Eric Bauman

What most Americans know, or think they know, about this country's penal system is largely based on imaginative paperback novels and sensationalized Hollywood film accounts.

My own knowledge is firsthand. For fifteen years, a substantial part of my life, I've worked as an officer in one of the nation's largest county correctional centers: a caretaker for society's outcasts, rebels, and predators. It's been a bumpy ride, emotionally, intellectually, and—surprise—spiritually.

Work in a correctional center as a corrections officer is not the ideal setting for a religious conversion. The socialization process leads elsewhere. My initial experience came at an impressionable moment in my life. I was twenty-four years old when I was given a badge and a uniform and, along with them, what I failed to see then, tremendous power over other human beings in a controlled environment. Not so much by direct instruction as by a sort of absorption, I learned and adopted the us-vs.-them approach of my peers in uniform; I yearned to be accepted and trusted by them and struggled with the stigma of being a rookie.

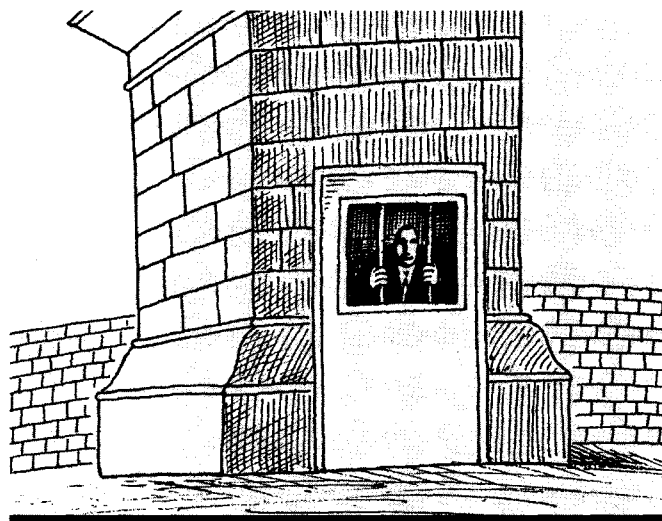
And, of course, I brought with me into the job a full share of ignorance and bias. I recall my first experience with inmates as they lounged around inside a recreation room, watched television, and smoked cigarettes. I felt an immediate tension. Most of them were young black males; they seemed to stare right through me as I patrolled the area. Why would they do that? The only things that registered with me were the color of their skin and the rage they seemed to exhibit so freely. I passed instant judgment: These men—all of them—were morally depraved, and my natural enemies. I gave little if any consideration to life histories, family backgrounds, economic status, education, chemical dependency. These were not persons, but inmates.

And I had control over them. I could reward or punish inmates for whatever reason I deemed fit. I could provide them with extra portions of food for conforming to the rules, or punish any who showed contempt for me by cutting their contact visits short. Depending on my mood for the day, I

could allow additional television time or curtail time on the telephone.

Moreover, I could use force. Violence can erupt at any moment inside a prison; guards are authorized to respond in kind, theoretically according to rules but actually at their own discretion. At first I was uncomfortable using physical force in the line of duty, but with each incident it became easier and finally it became a routine way of dealing with inmate disturbances, whether or not it was justified. I earned a reputation among both inmates and fellow officers as one not to be messed with. After some time it became obvious that I would not hesitate to use force in any given situation, and I began to rely on this notoriety more and more. I could administer either verbal or physical discipline whenever I felt it was necessary, at my own discretion. Any thought of counterattack by the inmates died quickly; they were aware of the presence of "back-up" officers and of the severe penalties an inmate would incur for attacking an officer.

Over time, as I now realize, my outward behavior began to affect my inner self. After several years on the job, I found myself becoming abrupt and harsh with all those around me, analyzing situations cynically, cutting people apart with sarcasm; a frequent phenomenon among those charged with law enforcement. My only friends were those fellow officers whom I trusted. Because of my dark moods and sharpness,



ERIC BAUMAN is a corrections officer and alcoholism counselor. He lives in Westbury, Long Island, New York.

even my parents became distant from me. Perhaps because of this I also began to be aware of my loneliness, a distinct sense of isolation that was totally unfamiliar to me. It was a salutary feeling, I now realize, but at the time it was hard to bear.

I recall feeling just this way, but in spades, one afternoon while riding alone on a prison elevator. I was on the verge of tears when the elevator stopped to pick up someone. As the door opened, I tried to hide my face in shame from the correction captain who entered. Knowing my reputation and sensing my embarrassment, she said nothing; but when the elevator stopped at her floor, she made one simple gesture that began the transformation that has led me to writing this account. Without saying a word, she pulled from her pocket a small gold crucifix and gently placed it in the palm of my hand. I remember wanting to run, to escape from that place. I went to an isolated area where I could be alone, and sat staring down at this figure, sobbing uncontrollably.

A second grace came to me around this time. Though I had been raised in a faithful Catholic family, I had long ago chosen to distance myself from the church and a God I viewed as absent rather than present. But when I encountered a friend from the old neighborhood, we exchanged confidences about feelings of loneliness we were both experiencing. He, his wife, and I decided to attend a weekend evening Mass together in the church from which we both had strayed. Because of the time I had been away and the guilt that seemed to consume me, it was an uncomfortable experience. But I found relief that evening in the celebrant's homily on reconciliation, and, eventually, in the encounter with those in the church community whom I came to know.

Thus began a process. In leisure time I began to read about the church and about its past and present-day saints. A friendly parish priest encouraged me to continue attending Mass, and to consider returning to school. He introduced me to others with similar experiences in their lives and jobs. At work, I began to set a distance between myself and those fellow workers I had once emulated and trusted. In small steps, I began to offer the inmates in my charge the same pardon and reconciliation I was receiving from the church.

These were positive steps, and yet it was a difficult and puzzling time. Internally, I constantly questioned this need to become something different. My doubts were reinforced by my estrangement from other officers, some of whom ridiculed my new attitudes toward inmates and portrayed me as someone not to be trusted. Fortunately, or providentially, I was introduced to a sympathetic priest who offered encouragement, and helped me to understand that anyone who decides to follow Christ in a serious way will encounter harassment from those made uncomfortable by that commitment.

That helped, all through the years that followed. I acted on the advice I had been given by completing my undergraduate degree in human services and continued on to be-

come a credentialed alcoholism counselor. I was now steering inmates into drug and alcohol programs inside the jail, scheduling appointments for them with vocational counselors, listening to them tell about their past lives. I've also counseled fellow officers afflicted with the disease of chemical dependency and with job-related problems. But to this day, six years later, I am still being confronted by skeptical/cynical peers who have nothing but scorn for my newfound attitudes toward the poor, the diseased, and the imprisoned.

Though that's still not easy to take, my academic studies seem to have grounded me and given me confidence in the possibility of reaching those I am responsible for. My family has stood in support of me, and I am indebted to them for their understanding. My wife and I attend Mass together with our newborn son, Eric Joseph, sometimes on a daily basis. There is now a genuine sense of mission with regard to my life as a correction officer, so that this job I once loathed I now see as a blessing and a grace. As anyone who has followed this story can see, others have been occasions of grace for me, so that it does not seem presumptuous that I can hope

George Good Change of Life

Suddenly you are still sitting there
when someone in you has gotten up
and walked out, slamming the door,
hoping never to be seen again.

Without a word, he has left you behind.
Who knows, maybe it was a woman's smile,
something you said, or the politics at the office.
Whatever it was, the damage is done,
and that long marriage with yourself is over.

Now you must get up and try to find him
in another time zone. Having broken through
the cocoon that protected your old future,
he's already out there living the authentic life.
He left you high and dry, the bastard!

He is out there alone at some corner bar;
he's hearing all our old songs from the other side.
He's walking cold and unfamiliar streets.
Now he's pausing to think his own thoughts
on lanes that are rich and quick with autumn
Soon he'll be forgetting all our old midnight talks.
You must follow him. There is no other choice.

by my behavior to teach something about human dignity and the meaning of the gospel.

It has not been easy for me to confront my own prejudices and weaknesses while at the same time questioning established and comfortable ways of dealing with the stresses of this work. But, from the story of the prodigal son to the dialogue between Christ and the thief on Calvary, I believe all people are constantly being called to conversion and chal-

lenged by that call. The biblical account I find most relevant to my own calling tells of Jesus sharing a meal with people thought to be unworthy. Seeing this, the Pharisees asked his disciples why he would associate with such people. Jesus overheard them and replied, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick....I come to call not respectable people, but outcasts." By that standard, I'm in the right place at the right time, and I'm grateful. □

MAXIMUM SPEED, MINIMUM PAY

Hanging clothes, serving lunch

Sally Gunter

I leave work with aching arms, and with conflicting feelings: dread that I must return, relief that I haven't been fired. For the first time, perhaps, I cannot perform the work that I was hired to do.

For two years, I have held low-paying jobs that are unrelated to some twenty years of newspaper work or to the master's degree in journalism I received thirty years ago. The reasons why: I want part-time work compatible with my ten-year-old daughter's school hours; I was out of the work force for fourteen years; I am over fifty; and, probably most important, I am computer illiterate.

Currently, I earn \$5.50 an hour working in the distribution center of a large department store. We open boxes of clothing shipped by vendors, strip them of plastic and, often, of their original hangers, rehang them, and send them on their way. I can work three days a week and I enjoy the time I have for myself and my family.

But then there's the work. We must hang a set number of pieces an hour—160 bathing suits, for example, 150 dresses, 105 coats. Our trainer told us that, in general, we should hang from 1,000 to 1,200 pieces in our 7 1/2-hour shift. A drug test is a condition of employment. Security officers may check our belongings for pilferage.

We are given box knives which cut easily through all but the toughest cardboard and plastic. Apart from opening the shipping boxes and stripping the plastic, our quota includes bringing "trolleys" to our individual work tables.

Trolleys—metal rods roughly two-feet-long—have clamps

on each end that fit onto a rail above our workspace. They are piled at two or three spots on our floor. The clamps make them cumbersome and easily tangled. We load carts with twenty or thirty trolleys, push them to our tables, and fit them on the rail, up to six or seven at a time. After we hang up to 48 pieces of clothing on a trolley (depending on weight), we push it down our line. The clothes are processed further and bagged for shipment to retail stores.

We also must toss our empty boxes on an overhead conveyor and find our own hangers. The hangers are scattered and, if not in new boxes, incredibly tangled in large bins. Sometimes trolleys and hangers are in short supply and I waste precious minutes searching and tugging.

I marvel as other women move one, two, three trolleys ahead of me on their lines. Some of them say I'm slow because of my three-day week. I think I simply lack their speed and dexterity. I can barely maneuver the larger boxes (called "coffins"). Some plastic resists the stabs of my knife, and my hands sometimes cramp. And the working conditions bother me. We often are surrounded by piles of plastic (which is recycled), boxes of trash, and, when the conveyor is down, scores of empty boxes. If I am fired, I won't miss these features of my working life.

But the physical work is good exercise and a store discount of 25 percent came with employment. Besides being awed by my co-workers' skills, I am encouraged by their spunk, which is sometimes mixed with cynicism, sometimes with ambition, almost always with humor.

I also earn more than I did in my first "re-entry" job. That was in early September 1993. The phone call wasn't exactly an answer from heaven. I was offered a job with the food service company that serves my daughter's school. This job, however, was in a girls' high school some thirteen miles away.

SALLY GUNTER, a previous contributor, worked as a reporter and assistant city editor for the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch and as a reporter for the Saint Louis Review, archdiocesan newspaper.

It paid \$4.35 an hour, a dime over minimum. But I'd spent more than a year looking, in vain, for writing or editing work, and I liked the school-hour schedule.

I became a "sandwich girl" and learned that maximum speed is expected for minimum pay. I was not used to mass-producing ham, turkey, roast beef, and peanut butter sandwiches. I made a combination on a loaf of French bread, then sliced it into six pieces. Lunch meat and mayonnaise squirted from many loaves as I tried to speed-slice; I ruined yards of plastic as I tried to wrap quickly; I kept jamming my price machine. During the actual lunch period, my left-handedness was no help as I served French fries with a right-handed scoop.

Through it all, I roasted. The heat from the grill, the fryer, and the steam tables permeated our work area. Minor burns and cuts prevailed in my first weeks. I might not have noticed if I did not have to put pickles in a fresh crock at the end of the day. I still remember how my hand smarted the first time I plunged it into that large barrel of brine.

I also was in charge of vending. Once, I misloaded the soda machine so that every student who pushed the Dr. Pepper button got a root beer. Coins spilled to the floor as I emptied money from the machine one afternoon; my face burned as I retrieved them. Often, the candy and chips I had loaded would not fall.

But we could laugh at our work, ourselves, and one another. I won't soon forget my boss, Rose, or my co-workers, Kathy and Karen.

Kathy could never tell one story without bursting into laughter. "This guy came in—he must have thought he was in the convent—and he said, he said [laughter], 'I'm here to fix the dishwasher,' and I said [doubling up and pointing to Karen], 'There she is!'"

Karen often yelled, "She died!" if someone called her by name when she was busy. One day, a student ordered a hot dog. Caught in a daydream, I took one from the grill, put it on a plate, and started to pass it to her. Karen bounded to the counter with a stage whisper: "Put a bun with it, Sally!" Next day a teacher ordered a hot dog and asked, "Does that come with a bun?" "Word must be out," I told Karen.

In contrast, hanging clothes is impersonal, as many factory jobs probably are. I don't know the last names or exact titles of my immediate superiors, nor the first names of many co-workers. There's not much chance to talk, though we do help one another sort trolleys and sometimes share trolley carts and hanger boxes.

My husband laughed at my pleasure the first time I told him I had made my quota. "It sounds like, 'Massa, I picked all de cotton,'" he said. But the fastest hangers on my floor are proud of it, and why not?

Still, both jobs seem—*are*—exploitative in terms of money paid for work demanded. But we all know worse jobs exist. "I just want a job where I won't get fired," one woman in my training group said. Another added, "I just want something different than [working in] a nursing home." □

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Richard Alleva

REEL PEOPLE, REAL PEOPLE

'Indian in the Cupboard' & 'Smoke'

Can there be such a thing as an ascetic children's movie? If so, it's called *The Indian in the Cupboard*.

What might have been an orgy of special effects obstinately remains human and humane, and proceeds to a climax determined by neither lighthearted slaughter nor multihued explosions but moral scruple. The grandest special effect in this film is the look of

wonder in the eight-year-old hero's face.

This Lynn Reid Banks story tells of Omri, a boy who discovers that one of his birthday presents, an antique wooden cabinet, can transform toy figures into actual—though miniaturized—people. These diminutives aren't engendered by the transformation but have been preternaturally plucked from the past. Omri soon receives some grim lessons about the consequences of action. Having transported an Iroquois brave from 1761, Omri must soon whisk a cockney medic off a battlefield of the Great War to tend to the Indian's wounds after Little Bear is attacked by a bird. Then, one of Omri's playmates, let in on the secret, decides that if you've got a live Indian, you gotta have a cowboy to go with him. So Boone the Texan is shunted out of 1879 still riding his horse. What fun! This cupboard stuff is better than virtual reality! Right?

But these playthings aren't virtual reality. They *are* reality. Omri may at first treat Little Bear as a pet, telling him to "go to bed now" at the end of the day, but the Iroquois is a dignified warrior who, at the moment of his rapture, was helping his nephew through a tribal initiation. And these toys of flesh and blood carry real weapons, can shed real blood, and have been taught by experience to use quick and deadly force against traditional enemies. Soon, Little Bear and Boone are at war with each other.

Obviously, much of the fun comes from the Gulliver factor: an eight-year-old is a giant to Little Bear, and Omri's everyday fauna of birds, dogs, and pet rats become an onslaught of monsters. Scenarist Melissa Matheson

(who must be considered the doyenne of juvenile movie scriptwriters after *The Black Stallion* and *E.T.*) and director Frank Oz haven't skimped entirely on good cheap thrills, but *The Indian* never becomes *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*. For instance, Little Bear's final encounter with the pet rat under the floorboards of a bedroom isn't even shown; the suspense is produced by keeping the camera on Omri's anguished face as the boy awaits the outcome. This sacrifice of spectacle in favor of emotion keeps the focus where the drama really is: inside Omri's head. Quite a Spartan achievement for a children's movie.

Omri's face, which seems to preside over the entire film, is the face of Hal Scardino, an unbeautiful, snaggle-toothed kid who communicates entrancement unaffectedly. The rest of the cast is adequate, except for David Keith. The role of the cowboy is a caricature but, instead of skirting the clichés of twangy folksiness, Keith transmutes them with comic brio.

Can there be such a thing as a morally serious kid's movie that succeeds at the box office? I can only report that numerous children I know aren't talking about *Batman Forever*, which, after its record-breaking opening success has now fled the multiplexes because word-of-mouth established it as the joyless idiocy that it is. Kids are talking about this movie (and copies of the book are disappearing from library shelves) because it gives them something to care about. The *Bat* had—in *Variety* parlance—no "legs" at the box office. But *The Indian* has wings.

Having learned from the Indian that all human life is precious and that all actions have their consequences, Omri will doubtless go on to learn more complicated things: that though we must not trifle, we must occasionally interfere with the lives of others; that painful consequences can issue from benevolent

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intentions; that joy can emerge from danger; that justice doesn't exist on earth, but we must keep striving for it anyway. Omri could learn these lessons simply by living, but if he wants a crash course, he can get his parents to take him to see *Smoke*, written by Paul Auster and directed by Wayne Wang.

Early in this film, a writer named Paul (William Hurt), so damaged by his wife's accidental violent death that he drifts about in a stupor, tells some guys in his friend Augie Wren's (Harvey Keitel) cigar store of how Sir Walter Raleigh attempted to weigh smoke. The poet-explorer simply subtracted the number of ounces of a smoked cigar's remains from the weight of the cigar in its pristine state. Ingenious. But is the result really the weight of smoke?

And how do you weigh other things, even less tangible than smoke? Your own life, for instance. The grief-numbed Paul is jerked out of the path of a truck by a homeless kid who calls himself Rashid (Harold Perrineau). The grateful Paul offers his apartment as a temporary crash pad for the teen-aged vagabond, but shows him the door when his presence interferes with the writer's concentration. Vile ingratitude? Maybe, but...since his wife's death, Paul hasn't valued his life. (That's why he nearly walked into that truck.) But like a cureless tic, his instinct for writing persists and is the one thing that gets him through each day. So, why should Paul repay Rashid for saving something Paul no longer values by sacrificing the activity that justifies his otherwise miserable life? That's my (warped) reasoning, not Paul's, but part of the fun of *Smoke* is the way it provokes you into considering such unmathematical equations.

But Rashid leaves something behind: a paper bag containing thousands of dollars. And he takes something with him: Paul's name. Why? Rashid has stolen from a thief and he's stashing the loot in the apartment; by assuming Paul's name, Rashid is out to find the father

who abandoned him. How Paul's name helps the boy win back his parent, and how the bag of money helps Paul's pal, the cigar-store owner, Augie, win back a piece of his past, while Paul gets a beating, a charming girlfriend, a new lease on life, and some great material for a novel, I will let you discover when you see *Smoke*. Expect happiness, not perfect justice at the conclusion. But perfect justice, after all, is as elusive as smoke.

Paul Auster's storytelling is intricate without being precious, and his dialogue is terse, funny, and poignant. Wayne Wang's direction is a model of tough love. He lets every scene breathe but never hyperventilate. With a sort of probing casualness, he lets us see curiosity or pleasure or disgust fill an actor's face for several seconds before he finally, even reluctantly, shows us what is causing the emotion. This device creates subtle suspense in situations where other directors would find banality. Keitel delivers a ten-minute monologue in medium-close-up with very few cuts to his audience (Hurt). Though it is mostly Keitel's wonderfully shaded, impeccably timed deliv-

ery that makes the scene work, just before the end of Augie's story Wang brings the camera slowly, slowly up to Keitel's face, finally zeroing in on the storyteller's mouth. This single camera movement underscores the words better than any offscreen music could.

All of the acting is at least good and William Hurt's honorable and irritable Paul may be the best work of this actor's career. It's just about the only movie portrayal of a writer that ever convinced me that the character up there on the screen really was creating literature.

But it is the face of Harvey Keitel delivering that monologue that will probably linger longest in my memory. Keitel, so out of his depth in *The Piano* that he couldn't figure out how his character should speak, so much in his element in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Mortal Thoughts* that he coasted on old tricks, here has a role that uses everything he can give and a director who has pushed him into giving a bit more. His leathery face has become a study in profane, fallible goodness, and it sums up the humanity of this profane, forgiving movie. □

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From mercy to murder

Death and Deliverance

Euthanasia in Germany

1900-45

Michael Burleigh

Cambridge University Press, \$18.95 (paper),
382 pp.

Daniel Callahan

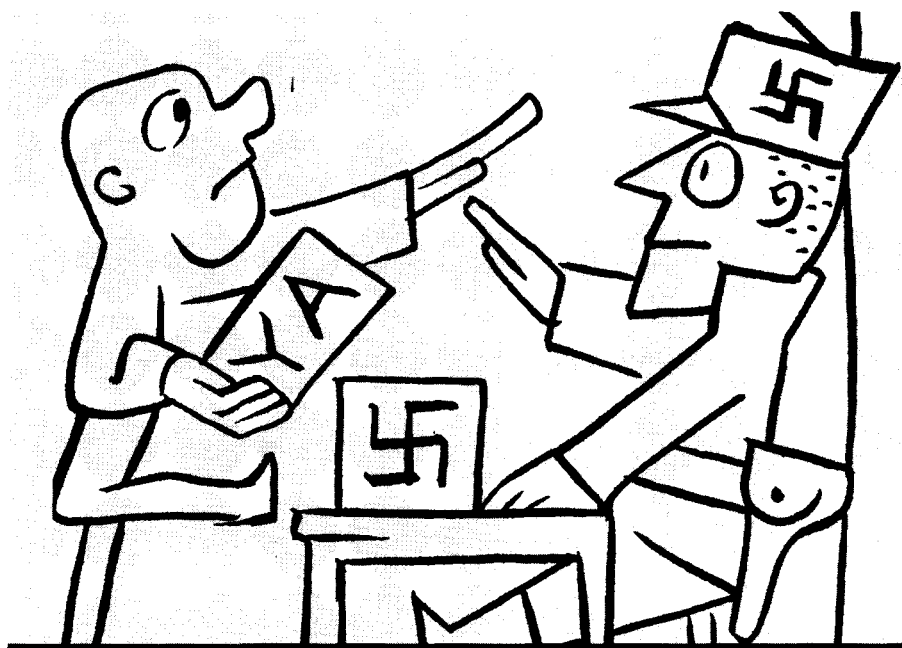
Not long ago, I engaged in an extended and generally friendly argument with a supporter of physician-assisted suicide. Much to my surprise, he said at one point that, while I had generally been reasonable and fair in my debate with him, I crossed the line into incivility by invoking the Nazi example of euthanasia. I had not noticed until then the extent to which, in recent debates, the Nazi analogy has all but disappeared from use, as if by some tacit agreement it has been judged irrelevant and inflammatory, just a nasty kind of

ad hominem argument. The exception to that generalization is the habit of a few prolife groups to label any and all discussion of euthanasia, allowing to die, and health-care rationing as crypto-Nazi (Nat Hentoff has said as much of some of my writings). That kind of rhetorical excess has no doubt encouraged even many of those opposed to euthanasia to avoid citing Nazi parallels.

Michael Burleigh's book on euthanasia in Germany, a singularly powerful, disturbing, and incisive history, should help to show what a mistake it is to doubt the current relevance of the German record. With the possible exception of the present situation in Holland, it remains the great historical example of the way in which what begins with mercy can end with murder; of how almost everyone can become complicit in evil given the right combination of circumstances; and of the ways in which economic pressures to control health-care costs can take a terrible turn.

Most important, Burleigh's study shows that, while the euthanasia program of the Nazis eventually fed into the systematic extermination of the Jews, it had its own, partially separable origin. It was not Jews who were the initial targets of the euthanasia organizers and enthusiasts, but those Germans whose misfortune it was to be born mentally or physically handicapped. By dating his history, "1900-45," Burleigh—a reader in international history at the London School of Economics—wants to make clear that the intellectual pieces of the euthanasia program were being put into place in German society well before the Nazis came along, as if a number of small, seemingly insignificant streams were working their way toward a larger, more deadly river that finally made its appearance in the 1930s, and then joining the still-greater effluence that was to become the "final solution" in the 1940s.

By the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, scattered voices could be heard calling for euthanasia in the name of personal choice and mercy, using arguments identical to those heard today. Perfectly identical. That view gained a following and was one stream. Simultaneously, eugenic ideas were making their way into the intellectual and scientific culture, and that was still another stream. In the extraordinarily high death rate from mass starvation in German mental hospitals during World War I, some early warning signs of the deadly shift official attitudes could take toward the mentally ill when resources were strained provided the first signs of still another stream. The influential 1920 tract of a legal scholar, Karl Binding, and a psychiatrist, Alfred Hoche, "Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life," coming at a time of great economic stress in Germany, saw the join-



ing of two of those streams, combining a call for euthanasia on humanitarian grounds (an "act of healing") with a commendation of its efficacy as a way of controlling the cost of caring for those who are a "burden" on society.

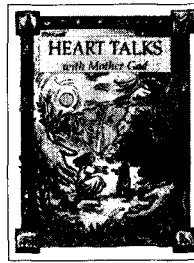
With these ideas already in place—and they were by no means unpopular notions during the Weimar period of the 1920s—it took only the organizational and propagandistic skills of the Nazis barely a decade later to give them a savage official expression. The euthanasia program began with the killing of institutionalized children, and then moved on to the mentally ill and mentally retarded. All pretense of mercy was soon dropped and the program became simply a way of opening up needed institutional space for military uses and of cutting the costs of expensive chronic patients.

While, in the end, Hitler decided for reasons of political expediency to keep the euthanasia program secret, it was in fact widely known to be taking place, certainly within the medical establishment, particularly psychiatry, but within the churches as well. About half of those killed during the first phase of the program were in religious institutions, with only sporadic and ineffective opposition from those who ran them. Many parents were by no means unhappy that their sick children were being killed and were even pleased by the way hospital authorities agreed to report the deaths as "natural," sparing the parental sensibilities and nicely obfuscating what was actually taking place.

No group in German society, and few individuals, come off well in this book, but its narrative power and telling details make clear and fully support the justice of Burleigh's harsh judgment. In a passage that catches well the style and nuance of his book, Burleigh writes that "A certain degree of haggling over the fate of individuals was permitted by the bureaucrats responsible for the policies, in order to promote collusive involvement, but also to cater for the element of human bad conscience." Authoritarian, established churches have more than once over the centuries tend-

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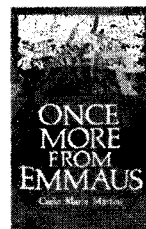


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ed to be deferential to authoritarian governments: in their desire for good order and discipline in the ranks, they understand each other all too well.

If it does nothing else than help us see how relevant the history of Nazi euthanasia is to our own debates many decades later, Michael Burleigh's book would be a signal contribution. That it is also written with such power and insight, so resistant to cant and cover-up, only increases its value. It is a terrible story he tells, one whose capacity to

disturb should forever be kept alive in societies that would be "modern." They are always at risk for that most deadly of cultural combinations: lethal sentimentality, singleminded efficiency, and a capacity for organized cruelty. In the gathering drive for physician-assisted suicide, we already have the lethal sentimentality. □

Daniel Callahan is president of The Hastings Center and the author, most recently, of *The Troubled Dream of Life: In Search of a Peaceful Death* (Simon & Schuster).

LATINO THINKERS, UP NORTH

The Hispanic Condition

Reflections on Culture and Identity in America

Ilan Stavans

HarperCollins, \$25, 242 pp.

Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo

Ilan Stavans has given us an entertaining series of essays on the literary expression of Latinos in the United States, contrasting these works with similar literature from Latin America. But despite the talent of the author and the sincerity of his attachment to the Hispanic (or Latino) people, this book is flawed. It is not that the author overreaches his competence by attempting

to explain the "condition" of all the different Latino groups. It is clear he knows and feels the Chicano (Mexican-American) experience most deeply, deriving his understanding of Puerto Ricans and Cubans by observation. Anyone writing about all Hispanics faces this hazard because one can belong biologically to only one (or two) of the groups that collectively are categorized as "Latino." Stavans does better than many in affording "equal time"—if not equal insight—to each of the groups.

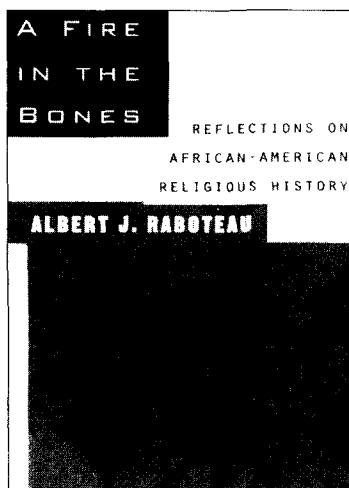
What renders *The Hispanic Condition* less than satisfying reading is the annoying and self-conscious effort to be cute and quotable on important and controversial issues. There is more posturing than position-taking here on matters such as bilingual education, affirmative action, and sexual mores. Does the epithet "dictator" really fit the

late Cesar Chavez? And if so, doesn't this harsh assessment require explanation? Why are the critical views of religion found in homosexual artists and writers emphasized while more informed interpretations of Catholicism such as Virgilio Elizondo's books on *mestizaje* are not mentioned at all? Does the tragic Reinaldo Arenas, who professed to fornicating "with more than 5,000 men in addition to a number of women, animals and natural objects really offer "a window to an undisclosed chamber of the Latino psyche,...a showcase of Hispanic life as an everlasting carnival"? Can one settle the issue of bilingual education with statements like: "Bilingual education is wrong. One's own family's language is private, personal, intimate; English is plural, communal, collective....These tongues may fight, they might hate each other—but they must coexist"?

Most distressingly, the author seems to have fallen into the jaws of snobbery, that is, he denigrates virtually everyone but himself and his professed soul mates, such as Richard Rodriguez. He finds it hard to give praise without taking it back by condescension toward someone else's achievements. For instance, Nicolás Kanellos "deserves applause for helping to shape Latino literature" but the literary press he directs is characterized as "nurturing a strikingly unbalanced backlist, preferring quantity to quality, often sacrificing excellence in pursuit of fair and vocal political representation." Chicano historian Juan Gómez Quiñones, we are told, is "dean of Chicano history" but his work is described as "an important though poorly written text, *On Culture*,...using obtuse academic jargon and offering statements that, when isolated, sound pompous and ridiculous." Academic jargon is important, however, when it refers to Stavans's own production, and he forces the publisher to the extreme of ten scholarly footnotes to cite himself. (There are only thirteen in the entire book).

Among the factual errors I found worth correcting are the following: it is sugar and *tobacco*, not cacao, which are the cash crops in most Caribbean economies; it did not take the rise of Fidel Castro to name a rum-and-Coke, "Cuba

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A FIRE IN THE BONES Reflections on African-American Religious History

ALBERT J. RABOTEAU

"A well-researched look at black Americans and religion, dispelling the notion that the slaves accepted their masters' beliefs without question. Comprehensive, clearly organized, and low-key—just the sort of thoughtful, undogmatic approach this material needs."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Raboteau brilliantly combines personal

narrative and historical scholarship throughout the work. His reading should prove especially valuable to all."—*Publishers Weekly*

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Libre"; Antonio Vanegas Arroyo should not be called Antonio Arroyo (neither should Antonio Stevens-Arroyo); the issue of a national language *was* raised in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 (about German).

But while Stavans should be criticized for his failings, he should be admired for articulating important themes of Hispanic literature. I believe Stavans's description of the Mexican entertainer, the late Cantinflas, to be masterful. He intelligently frames discussions on Mexican machismo, Puerto Rican docility, and Cuban politics so that a well-read outsider can better understand the importance of these issues in the Latino literature of culture and identity.

This is a literary analysis, not a sociological one. The author has not written about the condition of the 23 million Hispanics in the U.S. but rather about how a hundred or so artists and intellectuals struggle to link themselves to ordinary Latinos. Because this book is hawked on the dust jacket as a commentary on how Hispanics in the U.S. really live, Stavans's more limited scope must be emphasized. Taken for what it is, rather than for what some want it to be, this book manages to be worthwhile despite the obtrusive ego of the author. This book answers the question: Why would a light-skinned, Jewish, Mexico-born, Ivy-League-educated scholar be so eager to explain and defend his Hispanic identity when he could easily "pass" into mainstream society? *The Hispanic Condition* demonstrates the author's passionate identification with the Latino people even though such an identity is a conscious choice and not an imposed category. A Latino surnamed "Stevens" can empathize with this struggle of a Latino named "Stavans." Intriguing, witty, insightful, *The Hispanic Condition* is also biased, self-conscious, and wickedly outrageous. For the reader who can put aside concern for the daily experiences of the *pueblo* to explore the angst of a select few Latino writers, there is much that glitters here. And some of it is gold. □

Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo is professor of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College in the City University of New York.

LEFT OUT OF HISTORY

A Fire in the Bones Reflections on African- American Religious History

Albert J. Raboteau

Beacon Press, \$23, 240 pp.

Don Wycliff

When I was growing up, I was acutely aware that I was, for most of my school years, the only black child in my class and, except for my brothers and sisters, the only black child in my Catholic school. And I sometimes wondered whether there were others elsewhere in the same situation.

There were. Albert J. Raboteau was one of them. "Up North [in Ann Arbor, Michigan]," he writes, "black Catholics were few. I was one of a handful of black students in Saint Thomas School. I didn't say it, but I felt different, alone, far from my people, far from home."

Perhaps it is just the projection of one who sees exceptional similarities between aspects of Raboteau's life and his own, but I have the sense that this book is an effort by the author to find his way home, to go back in some fashion to

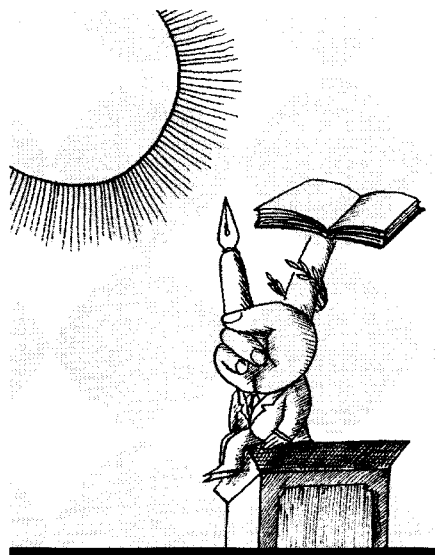
grandma's house in the Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, of his childhood:

In Bay Saint Louis, unlike the North, there always seemed to be time and space enough for the long-time love. In the evening twilight, we gathered for supper. The table was heavy with food, laughter, and stories, stories about the old people that went on long into the night, until the last warm sweet sip of anisette placed a benediction on the evening.... There was no rush about them, as with the people up North. They attended carefully to the daily tasks of community. Graciousness with others, gentleness, generosity, care, kindness, politeness—these were the virtues of my people, patterns that healed. These were my people. They had an ease about them that put others at ease, like a warm embrace.

If this seems to have nothing to do with African-American religion, that is absolutely right—and completely wrong. In the narrow, academic sense, it does have nothing to do with religion. But in the broadest, fullest sense—the only meaningful one—it has everything to do with religion. Supper, stories, healing, "the long-time love" and "the daily tasks of community"—those are central to religion, or at least to Christian religion.

And without reading too much into him, it seems safe to say that Raboteau feels that these—especially the healing and the building and maintaining of community—have been special concerns in African-American religion, if only because they were so badly needed.

This book actually is at least two books. The larger consists of nine essays, most of which have previously been published elsewhere. They vary widely in character, from a brief, almost journalistic explanation of new trends in African-American religion over the last



half-century, to a scholarly explication of what might be called African-American Christian theology, to an intriguing discussion of the points of convergence between the thought of Thomas Merton and that of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Raboteau, a professor of religion and former dean of graduate studies at Princeton, is a first-rate academic and probably the pre-eminent scholar of African-American religious history in the nation. So what he writes

in these essays is solid, bankable.

Simply in terms of filling a personal informational gap, I found invaluable the essay "Richard Allen and the African Church Movement," about the founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church. In terms of timeliness, the three reflections on "African-American religion and American destiny" were especially helpful in illuminating the recent decision of the Southern Baptist Convention to formally apologize for its acquiescence in

the original American sin of slavery.

The second book comprises the prologue and the epilogue. These two short pieces appear to have been composed explicitly for this publication, to try to give some coherence to the essays and justify their appearance in a single volume.

To be perfectly frank, they don't do that. In the end the book feels like what it is—a collection of disparate writings, all having generally to do with African-American religion but not really constituting a single argument or expressing some grand, overarching idea.

But to say that the prologue and epilogue don't work for their intended purpose is not to say that they don't work.

The prologue is as fine a defense of multiculturalism in education as I have ever read. It is largely an implicit defense, flowing out of a discussion of the tension between the demands of the historian's discipline and religious faith. But Raboteau is, at certain points, quite explicit, as, for example, when he asserts:

In the absence of black history, a myth of the American past developed, a myth that denied black people any past of significance....The recovery of African-American history served as a paradigm for the recovery of the pasts of other people whose stories had also been left out of American history.

The epilogue is less easily described. It might best be called a sermon—about the importance and possibilities of history, both personal and national, for healing our fractured national community.

Having recalled and reflected on episodes from his own personal history, like the one above about Bay Saint Louis, Raboteau observes: "Our nation too has ancestors. Now, as much as ever, we stand in need of their presence....Memory, story, ritual—these are all ways of remembering a community broken by hate, rage, injustice, fear. Not to avenge, nor to make up for, not undoing what can't be done, but perhaps to heal."

If for nothing more than this sermon, Raboteau deserves to be read. □

Don Wycliff is editorial page editor of the Chicago Tribune.

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SUMMER 1996

SNIFFING IT OUT

The Cunning Man

Robertson Davies

Viking, \$23.95, 469 pp.

Celia Wren

After presiding over a murderer's deathbed confession, the narrator of Robertson Davies's latest novel reflects that "life is not wholly a dull fabric of commonplaces and likelihoods." Indeed, as one might expect from an installment of Davies's stylized and hyper-readable fiction, *The Cunning Man* presents us with lives containing an economical number of likelihoods and almost no commonplaces at all. Fleeting past miracles, murders, a spiritual awakening in a bathtub during the London Blitz, a spiritual downfall in a boarding-school dormitory, and an Anglican church scandal that turns into Dostoevskian tragedy, the narrative vaults through the decades leaving mundane experiences tumbling in its wake. The events of decades are distilled into a handful of brightly colored images, and everyday relationships yield the raw material of legend.

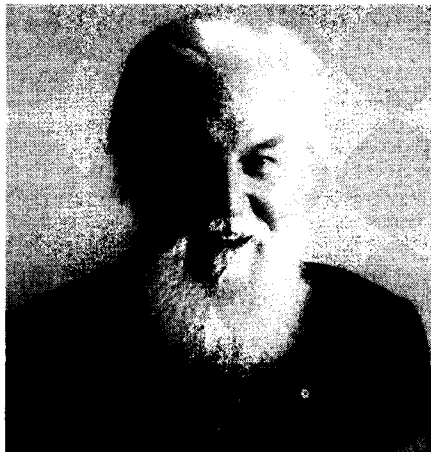
Encompassing several narratives that intersect at an Anglican church in Toronto, *The Cunning Man* is principally the story of its narrator, Dr. Jonathan Hullah, a shrewd, unconventional physician whose heroes are Paracelsus and Richard Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. In a set-up typical of Davies, whose writing favors characters reminiscing at length to interested and occasionally querulous listeners, Hullah is launched into reflection when a journalist consults him for an article on "The Toronto that Used to Be." Partly for her benefit and partly for his own, Hullah recalls his childhood in rural Ontario, his education, his medical apprenticeship as an army doctor during World War II, and his experiences in private practice as a diagnostician of eccentric methods, such

as smelling his patients to find out what is wrong with them.

Along the way he paints vivid portraits of his acquaintances, including several hypochondriacs, a beautiful Irish gynecologist, a giant Scotsman who powders his face green, two British lesbians who hold artistic salons and rate attendees according to susceptibility to the seven deadly sins, and a former naval officer reputed to have shared a meal with cannibals. Of particular importance is a strange, devout boy whom Hullah first meets at boarding school: Charlie Iredale, who treasures a copy of *The Monastic Diurnal*, and stays calm through unanaesthetized surgery by listening to the lives of the saints read aloud.

All of these encounters prepare the narrator to witness the drama that takes place at Saint Aidan's Church, when Charlie is a curate there. Hullah himself has joined this particular congregation after a bout of interdenominational church-hopping convinced him that "You must find the church that suits you, that you can stand and that can stand you, and stick with it."

Saint Aidan's suits him because its use of near-medieval liturgies makes it so "high church" as to strain the boundaries of the Anglican Communion altogether. Under the sway of Darcy Dwyer, a choirmaster obsessed with ceremony (who happens to have played the role of Mephistopheles in a local production



of *Faust*), the congregation attracts the ire of its bishop, who sends an archdeacon to preach on the Church of England's doctrinal Thirty-Nine Articles. Episcopal authorities are even less pleased when Charlie Iredale starts a campaign to canonize a priest who keeled over during the Good Friday service. Charlie is banished to diocesan Siberia, but support for the local saint survives as a cult on Saint Aidan's fringes.

Here Davies is taking up a theme he addressed more concentratedly in *Fifth Business*, the first volume of his Deptford Trilogy. That book's narrator, historian and hagiographer, Dunstan Ramsay, finds his calling when the otherworldly benevolence of a village simpleton sends him on a quest for the meaning of sainthood. Ramsay makes a brief appearance in *The Cunning Man*, and the cameo draws attention to the difference between the two books. *Fifth Business*, and the other volumes in the Deptford Trilogy, are books in which theme and narrative structure are so perfectly matched that each seems to drive the other. Each book starts out with a question about a character, and answers that question until the novel's format is exhausted.

In comparison, *The Cunning Man* seems diffuse. Its questions are many and varied. What is the essence of health, and of the healer's art? What is the right balance between wisdom and knowledge, humanism and science? What is sin? (A favorite question of Darcy Dwyer, who, like many Davies characters, likes to philosophize at length, with unrealistic eloquence.) When does elaborate ritual stop being a path to God and become "theological snobbery"?

These issues shift in and out of the narrative's scope just as some of the characters do, and the lack of focus makes for a book that is in some ways frustrating. It would be interesting to know, for example, how Charlie Iredale, the arrogant curate, grew from the earnest child who demanded of a boarding-school friend, "I never see you pray.... How do you keep your accounts balanced?" But since Charlie vanishes from the book during his intermediate years, his adult motivations are never

completely comprehensible.

Though a student of human nature, Hullah, for his part, doubts that it is ever possible to understand the essence of another person. He himself learned early in life, he says, to be "cunning" in concealing his true character, and even by the end of the book his personality is still elusive, despite the fact that he analyzes it with the same sharp attention he turns on his acquaintances.

But Hullah's "cunning" is wisdom as well as duplicity. His medical experience has taught him that it is no use treating the symptoms while ignoring the disease, and so when he observes the failures and losses of the people around him, he cannot keep from considering how

they have brought their fates on themselves. Rather like the victims of "friendly fire" he treats during World War II, his friends and neighbors are wounded by their own excesses of love and zeal, chief among them being Charlie, who had hoped to bring to Toronto "a revival of deep faith."

"Turn the Wizard toward the light, and you see that he is also the Fool," says Hullah, who likes to think of himself as a connoisseur of irony. He is the latest in the line of Davies characters alerted to the patterns in life, patterns that tend to become more and more spectacular the more commonplaces are removed. □

Celia Wren is a free-lance writer. She lives in New York.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

changeably: they are not the same country. I wrote only about Poland. Sadly, Dr. White seeks to denigrate medical treatment in Poland by labeling it "third world." In Poland the medical team, using German equipment for diagnosis, put a U.S.-made valve in my wife's heart. One of her five doctors *taught* in the United States. The team was connected via modem to a worldwide diagnostic network. "Third world"? "Middle Ages"? The terms seem to me bizarre.

References by my critics to "managed care" and "health maintenance organizations" are inappropriate; our U.S. experience was with private doctors and institutions. It seems that, even in responding to a factual article, agendas dominate the health-care debate, whether or not those agendas are relevant.

I am not an apologist for Poland or for socialism. In earlier experiences in Poland, working as a film-maker, I had been victimized by that country's *systematic* corruption of values under communism, so that I had many fears going there. But this experience in Poland was positive—that is a fact—while the U.S. odyssey showed evidence of a *systematic* corruption of doctors' commitments to providing medical treatment. When it is a battle just to get a doctor to speak with pa-

tients as an intelligent, caring human being, something is wrong.

I summarized, of course: enumerating details, however factual, would have made the article sound even more like a "diatribe." Let it be clear, however, that this was not a single "hospital from hell" experience; it involved two hospitals, seventeen different medical-care personnel, and four doctors' offices. I am sorry that to some readers I sound less than objective about certain doctors. Then again, with my wife's life at stake, is there any reason for me to strive for calm detachment?

A premise of my article was that one should value medical treatment on the basis of its accessibility and the ability and commitment of the caregivers. Our experience suggests that America's "best system in the world" does not automatically insure that these criteria will be met—nor does "socialized medicine" mean that medical treatment cannot be good, caring, and efficient. I also sadly conclude that we in the United States apparently do not have a commitment to health care as a human right. ROBERT C. FLEET

Don't mix up the imagery

Grateful thanks to Professor Charles Donahue, Jr., for his fascinating article, "Theology, Law, and Women's

Ordination" [June 2]—a splendid analysis, historical and psychological, of a subject too often these days treated without perspective.

The Catholic priest is essentially a sacrificer, a man perpetuating the redemptive bloodshed of Calvary, and also representing, as I understand it, the spiritual enactments from antiquity of the priest Melchizedek. As Professor Donahue says, the priest is not just an actor, a "poor player," at the altar: he embodies God the Son. To assign this sacrificial deed to feminine energy is indeed to "get the imagery mixed up"—and the imagery, after all, is rooted in the human configuration of male and female. Witness the amazing, adoring madonna-and-child thrust in Western art over the ages, along with portrayals of Jesus the man. The icons are clear. What muddled kind of thinking desires to scramble them?

Don't get me wrong. All humanity is at our altars, the feminine no less than the masculine—how else does the man come to be standing there? And that there is a wise, lawful ministry of women is certain. Equally certain is its disastrous undervaluation today, in the church and in society, by men and women alike. We need to discover or rediscover a topology in which feminine learning has its true and primal place. JANE WILGRESS

Pacific Grove, Calif.

The limits of metaphor

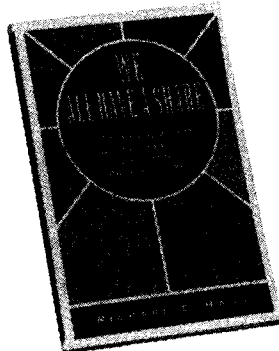
With respect to the comments by Professor Charles Donahue, Jr. on imagery, I suggest that one must be careful to distinguish metaphorical language from literal language. The purpose of a metaphor is to make an abstract idea, such as the love of God, clearer to listeners or readers by the use of concrete images of persons or things with which they are more familiar. Consider, for example, Exodus 19:4: "You saw what I, the Lord, did...and how I carried you as an eagle carries *her* young on *her* wings, and brought you here to me" (all italics mine).

(Continued on page 28)

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Christ himself often used various metaphors to describe the love of God and the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 24:37, he compares his solicitude and love for his people, his Jerusalem, to the care a mother hen has for her chicks. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a *hen* gathers *her* chicks under *her* wings, but you would not let me."

In that poor agricultural society, people were quite familiar with such a scene, just as they were of a shepherd searching for a lost sheep or a woman scouring the house for a lost coin. These concrete everyday images made the concept of God's love and care much more real to people.

Saint Paul happened to cite the love of a bridegroom for his bride to make clear how devoted and tender is God's love for us, his people, his church. But the Apostle's use of this metaphor no more bars women from the priesthood than Christ's metaphor involving a mother hen bars males. Surely no one would suggest that Christ literally meant that he is a hen and his people are chicks (however nurturing this notion); neither should anyone seriously argue that Saint Paul meant that Christ is literally a bridegroom and the millions of people who make up the church are "a bride" (however romantic the notion). Both Christ and Saint Paul spoke metaphorically to make the abstract

concept of God's love clearer to people.

For a woman to say Mass would *not* "get the imagery mixed up," as Charles Donahue asserts. What is "mixed up" is the misconception of the differing functions of literal and metaphorical language when one uses the bridegroom/bride metaphor as a basis for barring women from the priesthood.

ELEANOR JEANNE NOE
Cincinnati, Ohio

The author replies:

I must take responsibility for the sentence: "For a woman to perform this function [offering the sacrifice of the Mass] would be, to say the least, to get the imagery mixed up." The argument embodied in that sentence, however, is not mine: It comes from the 1976 declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter insigniores*. The argument is only hinted at in the pope's recent *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, which relies more heavily on the fact that Jesus chose only men to be apostles. But both Ms. Noe and Ms. Wilgress have focused on what, at least in my view, is a key link in a chain of argument supporting the proposition that the church has no power to ordain women.

To those who find Ms. Noe's argument attractive, I would ask whether the sharp distinction that she draws between the metaphorical and the literal sits comfortably within a tradition that confesses the presence of Christ in the form of bread and wine and which has developed a rich notion of

the sanctity of married love out of the phrase: "This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church" [Eph. 5:32].

To those who find Ms. Wilgress's argument attractive, I would ask why the distinction between male and female is, in this context, more significant than that between Jew and Greek or slave and free. To all, moreover, I would urge consideration of the "constitutional" question with which my article closed: Has it been revealed to us, or is it necessarily entailed in what has been revealed to us, that we as church have no power to ordain women to the priesthood? A good answer to that question would have to take into account the insights of both Ms. Noe and Ms. Wilgress.

CHARLES DONAHUE, JR.

CORRECTION ■ With thanks to a careful reader, we note that "Theology, Law, & Women's Ordination" [June 2] consistently refers to Pope John Paul II's *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* as an "apostolic constitution." In fact, the document was issued as an "apostolic letter." According to our correspondent, Richard R. Gaillardetz of the University of Saint Thomas School of Theology, an apostolic letter is "an ecclesiastical document of significantly less authority" than an apostolic constitution.

The religious angle

Re: David Carlin's column on the need for better religious reporting ["Beliefs Matter," July 14]: Good point, bad example. As a "perfect illustration" of needed religious reporting, Carlin proposed a story on how President Bill Clinton was offensive to his Baptist brethren and virtually a sure loser in the 1996 elections, because he is a "Benedict Arnold" to his faith and because he campaigns on "quasi-Marxist" theories ("It's the economy, stupid!").

Carlin discovered all this by reading that a 1993 Baptist convention had not invited Clinton to be a speaker. Your columnist must not have seen the several huge Baptist assemblies



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prior to and since his "snubbing" at which Clinton *was* invited to speak. They were all aired on C-SPAN, and revealed an extraordinary level of affirmation, boisterous approval, and even love for the president.

But even if Clinton were spiritual and political "dead meat," would the story Carlin suggests be the sort of religious revelation Americans need? Or would news stories adding spiritual context to important issues serve us better—stories that avoid personalities and judgmentalism, that might add the dimension of faith to our daily work and worldview? Faith-based journalism succeeds best when humility and love have guided, enlightened, and restrained its voice.

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Herbert J. Gans

The long battle between Detroit's last automaker, BIGONE, and its major international competitors has been settled with the U.S. government's 300 percent tariffs on foreign cars. While most of the media focused on the prohibitive costs of imported autos, the real news came from a highly placed BIGONE executive, Ms. Lada Edsell, who told a small group of reporters that within a year the company's automobiles would be produced entirely by computers and robots. Remaining production workers would be laid off and BIGONE would be able to undersell every automaker in the world.

Ms. Edsell admitted that BIGONE's ability to vanquish European, Asian, and African car manufacturers would last only until these companies were fully computerized and robotized themselves. At that point, the competitive struggle would be determined by which company could get along with the smallest number of executives—a criterion by which the United States is currently lagging.

Reporters, yet to work with robot executives, asked what it was like. Edsell reported that the executive robots still broke down frequently and spent too much time in the repair clinic. Yet when at work, they behaved in most respects like their human colleagues except for their inability to make small talk, their disarming politeness when their decisions were challenged, and their annoying habit of always being right.

Edsell said that BIGONE's human relations department would be working with the departing production-line employees on job retraining or welfare certification. Certified obsolete workers might qualify for the proposed congressional tax rebates for those who permanently leave the labor market. In

addition BIGONE was urging Michigan officials to revive the state unemployment insurance program, which was canceled after the congressional Libertarian-Conservative coalition abolished the federal program. Edsell said the auto workers' union would be helpful in this effort. But when most union members were laid off several years ago, the union closed its Detroit office and no one knew whether the UAW still exists. If it did, Edsell invited them to join this lobbying effort.

Finally reporters asked how the auto companies, and other industries turning to robotization, expected to sell their products since workers were also consumers. Who would buy BIGONE autos?

Edsell reported that at a recent board meeting there had been a lively discussion about the "customer problem," and that several ideas were being pursued. The most promising was to persuade the federal government to support BIGONE by providing laid-off employees with funds to buy cars. There were glitches, especially for immigrant workers imported in cost-cutting schemes by American manu-

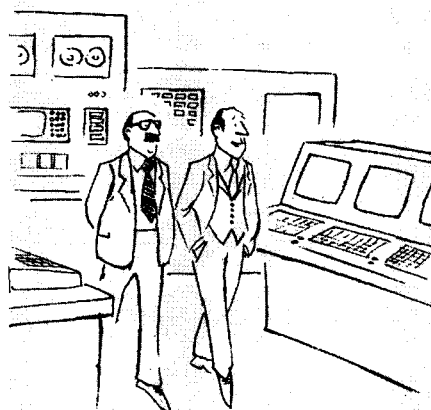
facturers. Would they be eligible?

Until Congress agrees to the legislation and the necessary appropriations, the board proposed giving old model cars, which were no longer salable, to laid-off workers, and surplus luxury models to jobless American executives. Some directors even proposed that surplus old model cars be given to poor people. This led to a debate about whether the poor were intelligent enough to understand traffic rules and morally reliable enough to obey them. The marketing department was enthusiastic about the giveaway measure because it would create good will. The finance department agreed, arguing that it would make the company eligible for new IRS charitable tax write-offs.

According to Edsell, one board member speculated that some day BIGONE, together with other American corporations, would have to persuade the federal government to buy all their products and distribute them to the citizenry as universal entitlements. Other directors angrily attacked the idea as socialistic, but a supporter of the idea recalled an early twentieth-century automaker who increased car sales by reducing prices and raising wages. He turned out to be a member of the Communist party and was forced out of the industry.

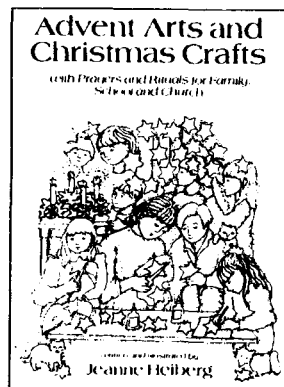
The directors put off further discussion of the customer problem, but first passed a resolution endorsing the American free enterprise system, which having successfully coped with past problems of capitalism would surely come up with an answer to the customer problem as well. □

Herbert J. Gans, the Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, is the author of the recently published *War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (Basic Books).



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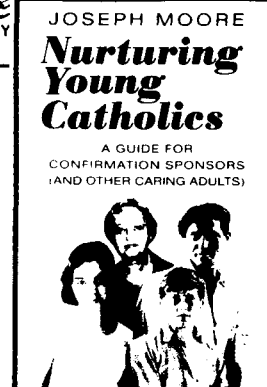
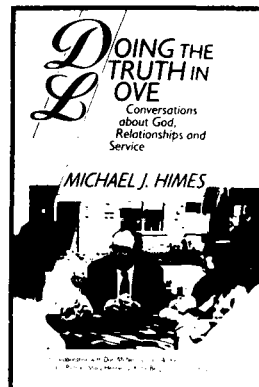
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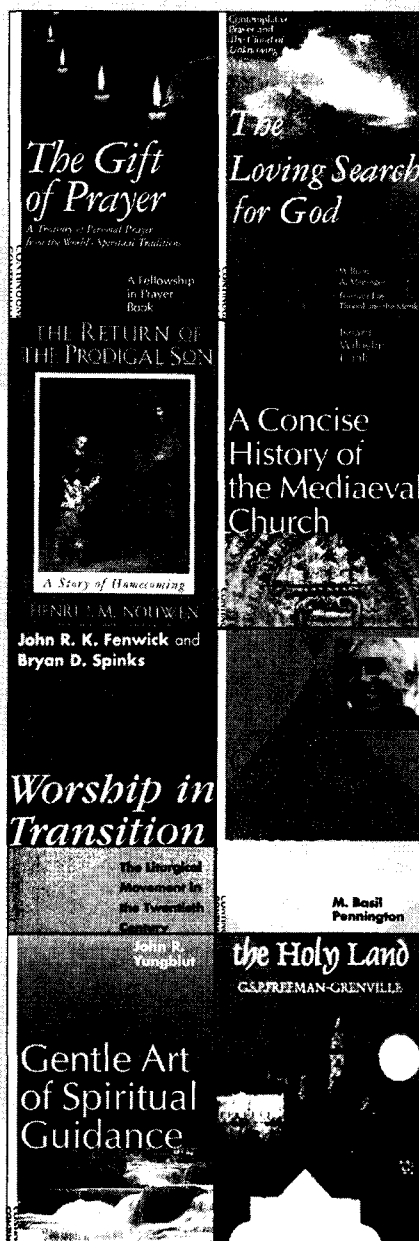
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